
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 44/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 7 MARCH 1994

AI INDEX: NWS 11/44/94
DISTR: SC/PO

NO OF WORDS:1116

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - SOUTH AFRICA

PLEASE NOTE: Enclosed is the updated version of the Bophuthatswana news service sent out in NEWS SERVICE 42/94. Because of recent events in Bophuthatswana and media interest raised, some amendments have been made to the original text and we decided to ignore the embargo and release this final version to the media today. Please feel free to do the same.

PLEASE NOTE: Some sections have suggested that, as a way of saving storage space and transformation time, we could reduce the News Service headline on the e-mail version. Press Officers could keep a master version of the full headline on their WP and just copy it in as they need it. Please let me know if you are interested in getting the e-mail version this way. Thanks - Dina

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161/26

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

South Korea - 9 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 32/94

Jordan - 22 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/94

South Africa (Bophuthatswana) - 11 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

Turkey - 6 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 26/94

Hong Kong - 21 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

****Colombia - 15 March**** - **PLEASE NOTE:** The embargo time of the Colombia campaign launch is 1700 hrs GMT, Tuesday 15 March 1994. All materials are embargoed until then. SEE NEWS SERVICES 40/94 AND 123/93 + UAs AMR 23/56-57/93

South Africa - 31 March - POSTPONED INDEFINITELY

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - NOTE CHANGE OF DATE - more details to follow Burundi - 16 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

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AI INDEX: AFR 53/WU 03/1994

7 March 1994

SOUTH AFRICA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE FREE POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN BOPHUTHATSWANA ON EVE OF ELECTIONS

Amnesty International views with alarm a rapid escalation in the repression of political activity in the South African "homeland" of Bophuthatwana. Reports today say the police beat and tear-gassed a crowd of striking civil servants, apparently under instructions from President Lucas Mangope of Bophuthatwana, and deliberately fired tear-gas into the Mafikeng offices of a human rights organization. Amnesty International considers that the South African Government, in particular, bears the overriding responsibility to protect the human rights of the "homeland's" residents.

Amnesty International is calling on the South African Government, transitional governing structures, the UN and other intergovernmental observer missions to take immediate steps to protect "homeland" residents from arbitrary detention, assault or extrajudicial execution at the hands of the "homeland's" police force and to ensure that people there can participate freely and without fear in the forthcoming national elections.

In a report released today, Amnesty International documents a pattern of serious human rights violations in Bophuthatwana. Laws permitting repression of political activity are enforced against political activists with increasing severity. By law, the security forces can detain government opponents incommunicado and use whatever force they deem necessary to disperse public gatherings.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by reports that at the beginning of March this year, President Mangope, who is also the "homeland's" Minister of Law and Order, exhorted his police force to assault anyone involved in labour strikes and public political activities, and to disrupt any "voter education" activities. Police reportedly targetted the Mafikeng office of the human rights organization Lawyers For Human Rights for two separate tear-gas attacks today.

During the past year a pattern of human rights abuses has occurred against ANC officials, other political activists, human rights activists and church leaders when they have attempted to organize meetings, training courses and publicity events in Bophuthatwana about the forthcoming elections. Amnesty International's report details incidents that demonstrate the politically-biased nature of the "homeland's" police force and the great difficulties faced by any person or organization wishing to exercise their internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

For example, in November 1993, 49 detainees at Mogwase police station were kicked and punched by officers and beaten with wooden pickhandles; in February 1994, a police officer fatally shot 19-year-old Mary Keitumetse Gaolalohe after police had earlier dispersed a peaceful gathering of 500 ANC supporters in the village of Mareetsane; and police repeatedly detained without trial Mafikeng ANC branch officials, including Nathaniel Ngakantsi, whose redetention on 17 February 1994 sparked a public protest which was violently suppressed by the police, who indiscriminately assaulted members of the crowd.

Amnesty International believes that South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) needs to speak out and act swiftly. The 1993 IEC Act clearly empowers the Commission to "make provision for the conduct of free and fair elections for the National Assembly and any other legislature to be elected" as contemplated under the new constitution. This includes the legislature for the region which will cover most of current Bophuthatwana territory. The South African Government is obliged to ensure that the IEC's election monitors and voter education staff have access to the territory without fear of violence from the "homeland's" security forces.

On 1 March this year, South Africa's Transitional Executive Council (TEC) indicated its intention to take action to protect the lives of the residents of Bophuthatswana and ensure free political activity. Welcoming this announcement Amnesty International is calling upon the TEC, the South African Government, the IEC and intergovernmental organizations' observer missions to take urgent steps to:

- ensure the repeal of all South African legislation which restricts free political activity and ensure that the Bophuthatswana authorities repeal similar provisions in the "homeland's" Internal Security Act and other laws inconsistent with free political activity;**
- authorize the Commission of Inquiry chaired by Mr Justice Richard Goldstone to conduct an urgent inquiry into the use of force by the Bophuthatswana Police against participants in public gatherings and against people taken into custody, and to establish an investigative unit with sufficient powers and resources to conduct proper investigations into complaints against the Bophuthatswana Police;**
- ensure that prior to the elections the Bophuthatswana Police are placed under the supervision and control of the South African Police, with the advice and assistance of international policing experts, including members of the intergovernmental organizations' observer missions;**
- make efforts to begin the retraining of the Bophuthatswana Police in methods of public order policing consistent with internationally recognized standards regarding the use of force and firearms;**
- ensure that such crucial pieces of legislation as the 1993 Electoral Act and the Independent Electoral Commission Act are incorporated into the "homeland's" body of law, and that members of the IEC and monitors appointed under its authority, as well as international observers, can operate in Bophuthatswana territory without fear of violence or obstruction from local authorities or the security forces;**
- provide the necessary protection for those who wish to vote in the elections, in order to ensure that they do not become victims of arbitrary detention, assault or extrajudicial execution.**

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